

# White Paper Report

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Institution: Electronic Literature Organization

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**Electronic Literature Directory: Collaborative Knowledge  
Management for the Literary Humanities**  
Grant Number HD-50778-09

**White Paper**

Including Appendix (project assessment by outside evaluator Professor Dee Morris,  
University of Iowa)

Project Director: Professor Joseph Tabbi, University of Illinois-Chicago  
Grant Manager: Professor Sandy Baldwin, West Virginia University

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“Electronic Literature Directory: Collaborative Knowledge Management for the Literary Humanities” (“the project”), Grant Number HD-50778-09, was a Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant in the amount of \$47,870. The project period lasted eighteen months, with the goal of rebuilding and enhancing the Electronic Literature Directory (ELD) using an open source, collaborative knowledge management platform and Semantic Web-based tools. The original project description was as follows: *In 1999, the Electronic Literature Organization (ELO) developed a comprehensive directory of electronic literature that has guided readers to thousands of works of electronic literature and helped to develop an international humanities discipline. But as the nature and complexion of the field has changed and matured, the directory has become both technologically and conceptually outdated. A decade after the release of the first incarnation of the directory, the authors and scholars at the Electronic Literature Organization will rebuild the Electronic Literature Directory (ELD) using an open source, collaborative knowledge management platform and Semantic Web-based tools. The new directory will make records of works of electronic literature more accessible to the public, a team of editors will develop a metatag vocabulary to better classify work and revise descriptions of listed works, and the finished product will show works in the context of critical scholarship about electronic literature.*

The following final white paper uses the original project description and plan of work that were approved by NEH as a point of departure. The white paper covers the entire grant period, but focuses on significant progress in grant activities beyond the previous reports, up until the completion of the grant period on 7/31/2011.

### **Project Activities**

The following provides a description of the major activities that occurred during the grant period. The original work plan described the following activities:

- 1) *To complete the coding necessary to implement the directory as we have designed it for the Drupal platform.*
- 2) *To complete and implement the visual design of the directory.*
- 3) *To have a three-day workshop meeting of those who are doing the technological design and implementation of the directory and those who are writing and editing descriptive records and scholarly abstracts for it.*
- 4) *To arrive at and implement a bibliographic metadata standard for works of electronic literature and formalize editorial procedures.*
- 5) *To port of records from previous directory to new version.*
- 6) *To publically launch the ELD.*
- 7) *To seed and edit the ELD by humanities scholars.*
- 8) *To continue writing and editorial work on the ELD.*
- 9) *To evaluate the project and plan for continued development.*

All these activities were successfully completed during the grant period. ELD development is ongoing, with a distributed team of editors and authors. The updated and greatly improved interface and backend are in place. There were no significant omissions or changes in project activities.

The project faced minor delays in completing the coding and design for the updated directory. As a result, the new site only went live at the beginning of September 2011. The site was revised based on usability testing and on the project's goals to deepen use of collaborative, crowd-based techniques. There were two primary reasons for the delays:

- 1) Working with a team in dispersed locations was more complex than anticipated. Members of the technical team were scattered all over the USA and never met in person. Virtual meetings were efficient and successfully moved the project along, but some aspects of scheduling and meeting deadlines are more difficult with a distributed team.
- 2) Coding and design, especially integration of coding with design, was more complex than anticipated. The specific obstacle was the labor required to integrate the back end Drupal coding with the graphic design elements. The grant funded a programmer and designer, but not a CSS implementation person to bring the pieces together. We did not foresee that this requirement would be significant and beyond the scope and available time of other members of the team. The solution arrived at was to hire additional personnel, specifically a CSS programmer, and to fund this person using monies from the ELO. The cost was similar to the NEH-funded programmer and designer. It was well worth it and allowed us to complete the ELD re-design.

The addition of the CSS programmer was one of two changes to the project personnel. The other was the addition of Professor Charles A. Baldwin (Sandy) as financial and technical manager for the grant. Baldwin was already a member of the ELO Board of Director and acts as Treasurer for the organization. He joined the project soon after the grant was awarded.

Federal matching funds were not a component of the award.

The technical details of the project were largely as described in the grant proposal. The new interface and backend are vastly superior. The design is more attractive and intuitive for the new user, while the editorial interface is more powerful and allows for greater discussion and commentary.

The project was publicized throughout the period under review. Publicity included presentations at academic conferences and published essays (see details listed below).

### **Accomplishments**

In all, the project accomplished the proposals in the applications, including: the public launch of the ELD; the development of bibliographic metadata standards for electronic literature to make e-lit more widely available to library cataloging systems; and the establishment of an international, para-institutional network of first-generation humanities scholars with a career commitment to the field of electronic literature and digital humanities.

Notably, the revised ELD is stable, user-tested, and greatly improved.

The development of the metadata standards are still at a basic level. The project team developed standards for use within the ELD, and met with representatives of other major

electronic literature projects, such as the Europe-based Electronic Literature as a Model of Creativity and Innovation in Practice (ELMCIP), to discuss interoperability and international standards. Agreements were reached in principle for developing these standards, but more talks are needed before they can be finalized. The authorial and editorial network is in place, with many established and emerging scholars making significant contributions to the ELD. Sustaining this activity and interest will be a major challenge beyond the grant period. The project team is exploring other forms of funding. In addition, we are connecting the ELD with the *electronic book review*, an established online journal, with the goal of leveraging shared resources and using the contributor bases from each project to support the other.

Porting records from the previous version of the ELD is ongoing. The team experimented with a variety of automatic methods for porting these records, and ultimately decided that they needed to be copied over by hand. The process is laborious and will probably not be done until early next year.

The project received outside assessment, as described below. However, we are only now implementing the proposed online response form for additional user feedback. This implementation was delayed by the delay in completing the updated ELD, as described above. We hope to have the response tool in place by the end of October 2011.

### **Audiences**

The primary audience of the project is scholars, artists, and the general public with an interest in electronic literature. Members of the project team have brought an increasing number of students to interact with and comment on the ELD.

In addition, we can break the audience for the project into the team of editors and writers who contribute to and create the project, on the one hand; and the scholars, artists, and public who use the ELD, on the other. In the former group, we show a total of 120 contributors to entries in the ELD during the grant period. While this is a significant tribute to the social aspect of the project's editorial process, the majority of the entries were created by a core of 44 editors. An even smaller group of 15 formed the team who did the bulk of writing and editing. What these numbers show is the concentric circles of engagement in such a crowd-based project.

One significant impact across institutions is the apprenticeship in project management and participation on the part of young scholars, particularly as members of the editorial team. Of the core team of 15, virtually all are emerging scholars who made a significant intellectual and professional investment to the ELD. Moreover, these scholars are based at institutions all over the USA and in Europe, and thus contribute to a growing communication network around electronic literature.

Outside traffic to the new ELD shows relatively little increase as yet, but the site has only been live for a few weeks. We expect greater public engagement as we publicize the launch more widely.

### **Evaluation**

The grant proposal called for a final assessment from an outside scholar. To complete this task, the project team employed Professor Dee Morris of the University of Iowa. Professor Morris is a respected scholar of American literature and of new media, notably

the co-editor of the collection *New Media Poetics* (MIT, 2006). Professor Morris was given unfettered access to the staging site for the new directory, and to all documentation around the project. Her detailed report concludes that the project's "exemplary work deserves the gratitude and commendation of the electronic literature community." She also provided a number of specific suggestions for improving the project. We will adapt these suggestions as we continue beyond the start-up stage. *The report is included at the end of the current document.*

As noted above, the project's online assessment tool is only now being put into place. It should be live by the end of October.

### **Continuation of the project**

The project team entered into two significant new collaborative partnerships during the period under review. Firstly, we agreed to standardize and exchange metadata with the ELMCIP project. We continue to discuss and refine this process. Secondly, the project team will collaborate with *electronic book review*, a leading online journal. This collaboration will let us pool editorial resources, helping to develop the journal at the same time as we continue to grow the ELD.

### **Long Term Impact**

As one of the four major initiatives of the ELO, the ELD will continue to be a priority for the organization. Our next steps will be to 1) complete the online assessment tool and porting of the ELD Version 1.0 records; 2) to finalize and strengthen the partnerships mentioned above; 3) to implement the recommendations made in the outside assessment below; and 4) to seek additional funding for a larger project team.

### **Grant Products**

The primary final product of the project was the updated ELD, available at <http://directory.eliterature.org>. The September 2011 directory launch and release was publicized widely to humanities scholars and the general public, via ELO mailing lists and social media websites. In October and November 2011, the re-launched directory will also be announced to major print media channels via press releases coordinated by our Communications Director Mark Marino. The project was discussed and shown at major conferences in the field, such as the Digital Arts and Culture Conference and the ELO Conference. It will also be shown and discussed at the upcoming 2012 the Modern Language Association conference. The following is a partial list of conference presentations, publications, and other products by the ELD team.

#### **Maria Engberg, ELD Editor**

##### Journal Publications

"The Polyaesthetic Reader and the Changing Condition of Literature." in *Literature and Multimedia in late 20th and 21st Century Europe*. Marcel Cornis-Pope, ed. John Benjamins Press (Series on Histories of Literatures in European Languages). Peer-reviewed. Forthcoming 2012

"Digital Literature and the Modernist Problem." with Jay Bolter. *Digital Humanities Quarterly*. Forthcoming 2011.

"Jag är dikt, vi är litteratur tillsammans" *Pequod* (Swedish poetry journal)  
<http://pequod.nu/2011/04/maria-engberg-jag-ar-dikt-vi-ar-litteratur-tillsammans/>  
(The ELD specifically linked)

“Speculative Aesthetics: Where to the Humanities?” Review. *electronic book review*.  
<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/trialectical>

“Aesthetics of Noise in Digital Poetry.” *Cybertext Yearbook Series*. 2010.  
<http://cybertext.hum.jyu.fi>.

#### Conference and Symposium Papers

“The Anxiety of Literature in the Age of Social Media and the Problem of Reading.”  
University of Bayreuth. July 18, 2011.

“The ever-Moving horizon of expectations: a problem of ‘Medium-Identification’.”  
Adaptation and Media Transformations: Intermedial Studies Symposium Series  
#3. Linné University, May 2011.

“Taking My Time: Anxiety of Narrative and Temporality in Steve Tomasula’s TOC  
and VAS.” Narrative Conference 2011, St Louis, April 2011.

“Playful Reading and/as Research.” Centre de recherches en littérature et cognition  
(C.R.L.C., EA 1569)  
Concepts pour les études littéraires / Concepts for literary studies. Université  
Paris 8, March, 2011.

“Polyaesthetics in Digital Literary Arts: Steve Tomasula’s TOC and Multi-Media  
Fiction.” ASAP: Configuring the Present across Arts and Media. Trier, Germany.  
October, 2010.

“Polyaesthetics in Digital Literary Arts” Virtual Space and Time in Media. Virtual  
Space and Time in Media: Intermedial Studies Symposium Series #1 Linné  
University, October, 2010.

“Electronic Literature Directory: Pedagogical Concerns.” Electronic Literature  
Organization 2010 Archive & Innovate. Brown University, Providence, June 2010.

“Digital Literature and the Modernist Problem.” With Jay Bolter. Futures of Digital  
Studies 2010, 5th Digital Assembly. Gainesville, Florida, February 2010.

#### Courses

Social Media Ecologies: Master level course, 2nd year. University of Bayreuth  
(Summer Semester 2011). *ELD used for an assignment and as resource*.  
<http://socialmediaecologies.wikispaces.com/Material>

Experimental Digital Media: 4000-level course. Georgia Institute of Technology.  
School of Literature, Communication and Culture. (Fall semester 2011). ELD  
resource. *The course focuses on experimental writing, locative media and AR  
technologies. Digital literature is a substantial part of it.*

Introduction to Media Studies: 2000-level course. Georgia Institute of Technology.  
School of Literature, Communication and Culture. (Fall semester 2011). ELD will  
be used as resource for the 3 seminars on digital literature.

Invited lectures where the ELD was used as resource (also given to students for  
forthcoming projects)

“Digital literature and verbal-visibility.” November 2010. Uppsala University: Master  
level course in English dept.

“Digital and electronic writing” January 2011. Malmö University: Master level course  
in Interaction Design program.

#### **Davin Heckman , ELD Editorial Board Director**

##### Manuscripts

Heckman, Davin (proposal under review). *Grasping at Loose Bindings: The  
Humanistic Study of Emerging Literary Forms*.

##### Journal Publications

Heckman, Davin (under review), "The Disturbed Dialectic of Literary Criticism in an Age of Innovation." *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* ([www.leoalmanac.org](http://www.leoalmanac.org)).

Heckman, Davin (forthcoming), "The Politics of Plasticity: Neoliberalism and the Digital Text." *New Formations*.

Heckman, Davin (2011), "Technics and Violence in Electronic Literature." *The Digital Humanities: Beyond Computing*. Federica Fabretti, ed. *Culture Machine* 12: ([www.culturemachine.net](http://www.culturemachine.net)).<http://culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/435/464>

Heckman, Davin (2011), "Electronic Literature as a Sword of Lightning." *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* 1 ([www.leoalmanac.org](http://www.leoalmanac.org)).  
[http://www.leoalmanac.org/index.php/lea/entry/electronic\\_literature\\_as\\_a\\_sword\\_of\\_lightning/](http://www.leoalmanac.org/index.php/lea/entry/electronic_literature_as_a_sword_of_lightning/)

Heckman, Davin (2011), "Inside Out of the Box: Default Settings and Electronic Poetics." *Dichtung Digital* (<http://dichtung-digital.mewi.unibas.ch>).

Conference and Symposium Papers

(Proposed, under review) "The Politics of Plasticity: Neoliberalism and the Digital Text." Institute for Modern and Contemporary Culture (<http://archivingcultures.org>), University of Westminster, October 2011.

Materialities of Text: Between the Codex and the Net.

"Tagging Practices and the Disturbed Dialectic of Literary Criticism." Sabanci University, September 2011, ISEA2011.

"Contesting the Netopticon." *Empyre* ([www.subtle.net/empyre](http://www.subtle.net/empyre)), January 10-31, 2011.

"New Media Art and Writing: Towards A Glossary of Literary Terms for Digital Environments." University of Western Sydney, December 2010. International Science Linkages Program of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

"Videoconference and Discussion on Collaboration between ELD and ELMCIP Knowledge Base." University of Bergen, September 20-21, 2010. Bergen Seminar on Electronic Literature Communities.

"Using the Electronic Literature Directory 2.0." Brown University, June 3-6, 2010. ELO\_Archive & Innovate.

"E-Ject." University of California Irvine, December 12-15, 2009. Digital Arts Conference.

#### Courses

DIKULT 203: Electronic Literature. University of Bergen. Fall 2011.

ENG 360: Electronic Literature. Siena Heights University. Winter 2010.

#### Joseph Tabbi, ELD Project Director

"New Media: Its Use and Abuse for Literature and for Life." A remix of Friedrich Nietzsche, appearing with art essay/performances in the web accompaniment to Mark Amerika's *remixthebook* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, August 2011).

"Graphic Sublime: On the Art and Designwriting of Kate Armstrong and Michael Tippett." Catalogue essay for the Prairie Art Gallery, Alberta Canada (2011). Currently under peer review for publication in *Digital Humanities Quarterly*.

Interview with Nick Montfort, on the launch of the Electronic Literature Directory (September 2010): HYPERLINK "<http://nickm.com/post/2010/09/the-new-electronic-literature-directory/>"

"Cognitive Science," "Electronic Literature." Entries in the *Routledge Companion to Literature and Science*. Eds. Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini, 2010.

- "New Media, Nonesuch: A Response to Matt Cohen. *American Literary History* 22.2 (2010): 320-24.
- "Electronic Literature as World Literature, or: The Universality of Writing Under Constraint." *Poetics Today*. Special issue eds. Hans Baetans and Jeans-Jacques Poucel. 31.1 (2010): 17- 50.
- "On Reading 300 Works of Electronic Literature: Preliminary Reflections." On The Human. HYPERLINK "<http://www.onthehuman.org/> July 2009), a forum sponsored by the National Humanities Center (Research Triangle, North Carolina). Presented in *Beyond the Screen: Transformations of Literary Structures, Interfaces and Genres*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag. Eds. Joegen Schaeffer and Peter Gendola, 2010.
- "Toward A Semantic Literary Web: Setting a Direction for the Electronic Literature Organization's Directory." Online at HYPERLINK "<http://eliterature.org/pad/slww.html/>" (April 2006). Reproduced in the Siegener Periodical for International Empirical Literature Study (SPIEL 2010).
- "Locating the Literary in New Media." *Contemporary Literature*. vol. 49 no. 2 (Summer 2008). Review essay on Thomas Foster, *The Souls of Cyberfolk*, N. Katherine Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer*, Martin Kevorkian, *Color Monitors*, and Matthew Kirshenbaum, *Mechanisms*. Presented at the Electronic Literature Organization meeting (Vancouver, Washington: May 2008).
- Australian Research Council Eminent Visitor. Keynote Lecture Series. University of Western Sydney. First visit and workshop (ten days): December 2010. Next visit (five weeks) set for December 2012.
- Association for American Studies, "American Studies as New Media Studies." San Antonio, Texas, November 2010.
- "5th Annual Digital Assembly Conference: Futures of Digital Studies 2010." Keynote speaker. University of Florida, February 2010.
- "E-Ject." University of California Irvine, December 12-15, 2009. Digital Arts Conference.
- Panel participant for Electronic Literature Directory and for a retrospective on Robert Coover at Brown University, June 3-6, 2010. ELO\_Archive & Innovate.
- "The Network as a Space and Medium for Collaborative Interdisciplinary Art Practice." Invited talk. Bergen, Norway, November 2009.
- Guest speaker at a workshop of the Digital Fiction International Network, Sheffield Hallam University, August 2009.
- Invited talk at the University of Basel and Imprimerie Center for Interdisciplinary Research (July 2009).

**Patricia Tomaszek, ELD Editor**

Tomaszek, Patricia. "Reading, Describing, and Evaluating Electronic Literature for Archiving." *Archivierung von digitaler Literatur: Probleme - Tendenzen - Perspektiven / Archiving Electronic Literature and Poetry: Problems, Tendencies, Perspectives*. Hartling, Florian, Beat Suter, eds. SPIEL: Siegener Periodicum zur Internationalen Empirischen Literaturwissenschaft. 29 (2010). 1+2.

**John Vincler, ELD Editor**

- Vincler, John. "Electronic Literature in Archives and Special Collections in the United States, an Overview." *CELL International Workshop on Databases and Bibliographic Standards for Electronic Literature*. Part of the Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) funded Electronic Literature as a Model of Creativity and Innovation in Practice (ELMCIP) Project. Bergen, Norway. June 20-21, 2011. Invited Plenary Speaker.
- Vincler, John. "From the Embodied Book to Books without Bodies: Contextualizing Born-Digital Literature in the Special Collections Library," *Navigating Information Connections: Hypertext as Agent of Change*, University Libraries Second Annual Book and Media History Talk, University of Colorado (Boulder), December 3, 2009. Invited lecture.
- Vincler, John. "Unmasking the Origins of Digital Texts and Code Culture: Calculating Machines as Encoded Textual Operations and the Birth of Code in the Age of Print," The Culture of Print in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Medicine (STEM) Conference, Center for the History of Print Culture in Modern America, (University of Wisconsin, Madison), September 12-13, 2008. Presentation.

## Appendix: Project assessment by outside evaluator

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September 1, 2011

To: National Endowment for the Humanities / Grant Review  
Re: Electronic Literature Organization Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant (2009-2011)  
From: Adalaide Morris, Professor of English, University of Iowa

This Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant was directed by Professor Joseph Tabbi, coordinated by Professor Charles Baldwin, and carried out by a five-member Design and Implementation team with the assistance of an extensive Editorial Working Group. The objective was to design and put in place Version 2.0 of the Electronic Literature Directory (ELD). Initiated by the Electronic Literature Organization (ELO) as part of its mission to facilitate and promote the writing, publishing, and reading of literature in electronic media, ELD Version 1.0 aimed to be the first “comprehensive directory of electronic literature.” By 2009, however, this resource had been strained by the proliferation of electronic literature and technologically and conceptually outdated by advent of Web 2.0’s open-source, collaborative apparatuses and by the affordances of Web 3.0, the so-called Semantic Web. With the support of the Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant, the ELD team of programmers, scholars, and writers has met its goal to bring a vital resource for the digital humanities into a newly collective and collaborative stage of knowledge management and value creation.

In preparation for writing this report, I have examined the materials on the ELD website, read through the directory entries, perused the Working Group Handbook for prospective annotators, and reviewed a series of essays and reports that discuss the complex issues surrounding this project. These key documents—most importantly, Joe Tabbi’s 2007 white paper “Toward a Semantic Literary Web: Setting a Direction for the ELO’s Directory,” his 2009 reflections “On Reading 300 Works of Electronic Literature” (followed by 36 comments from project co-workers), and his 2010 essay “The Electronic Literature Directory: Postproduction”—both precede and accompany the work accomplished during the grant period. Together these materials provide an overview of the project’s ongoing goals and procedures.

The aim of this report is to list initiatives that continue to support and facilitate the goals of this project, assess whether the grant’s stated objectives have been met, consider its long-term needs, and make a number of suggestions for its future development.

The project’s matrix. The two large contexts for this ELD upgrade are the rise of social media and a crowd-sourced vision of the Web, on the one hand, and, on the other, the development of a federation of allied initiatives through which the ELO pursues its mission of facilitating the composition, dissemination, and cataloging of literature in electronic media.

The ELD exists as part of an array of ELO initiatives that include:

- The Preservation/Archiving/Dissemination (PAD) Project, dedicated to the “creation of a ‘permanent, centralized distribution point’” for electronic literature;
- The Consortium of Electronic Literature (CEL) Initiative, dedicated to the formation of a group of allied organizations and endeavors designed to meet the need for sustainable, networked, editorial activity, technical interoperability, and visibility at the level of libraries, archives, and collections;

- The Electronic Literary Collection (ELC), edited by a rotating group of artists and scholars who select, update for viewing, and disseminate through the Web and freely available CD-ROMs anthologies of key works of electronic literature (2007, 2011, and ongoing); and
- a series of annual three-day conferences dedicated to the presentation, analysis, and celebration of works of electronic literature.

The long-term success of the ELD's transformation from a curatorial listing to a crowd-sourced knowledge-management system depends on the flourishing of a robust, diverse, and open-ended community of people who care about electronic literature. For this reason, it is crucial that the ELD is not a stand-alone venture but part of a matrix of initiatives designed to engage and enlarge an audience eager to construct, maintain, and use it.

The project's objectives: As the Handbook describes it, "ELD 2.0: A Networked Evaluative System" is at once a practical and an idealistic venture. Its comprehensive aim is the consistent, collaborative, and frugal use of the affordances of network technology to create a directory of the expanding corpus of electronic literature, develop a set of metatags adequate to its description and classification, and provide an apparatus to facilitate productive debates about its meanings, methods, and evolution. The project's short-term goal has been accomplished: with the support of the start-up grant, the team has developed a set of protocols for the drafting, checking, and editing of individual records, created a working build of the directory, and launched it for public use. The long-term challenge will be to build a wide community of participant-users committed to the crowd-sourced knowledge management of electronic literature.

The project's architecture is a principled response to the politics of both the traditional academy and the historical avant-garde. ELD Version 1.0's effort to provide a "comprehensive" record of electronic literature risked entangling the project in a top-down enterprise of academic authorization: in the long run, comprehensiveness can be achieved only if there are clear definitions of a category, consistent rules for its maintenance, and a set of canon-forming generalizations about its lineages and traditions. Not unlike the academic politics it opposes, avant-garde politics require an articulated aesthetics, an exemplary group of practitioners, and the production of ever more specialized and exclusive knowledges. If, as the ELO believes, electronic art forms confound traditional practices of documentation and preservation because of their multiplicity, their ephemerality, and the variability and rapid obsolescence of their formats, Version 2.0 of the directory needed to be constructed on a foundation of flexible, democratic, bottom-up procedures. As an editorial note on the website puts it, ELD 2.0 had to take the calculated risk of becoming "a sprawling and chaotic assemblage of voices writing about an equally sprawling and chaotic body of work."

Description of the apparatus: The build of the directory that went live on January 1, 2010, is designed to be adequate to the burgeoning material it catalogues. The paragraphs that follow describe its characteristics and offer a set of recommendations for future development.

a) **Directory entries:** The entries that now populate the directory are clear and informative. Composed for the use of a target audience of non-experts, most employ understandable terms to describe both the operations of the work-at-hand and its position within the developing corpus of electronic literature. The average length of the nearly 300 entries is one-to-five paragraphs; the tone is predominantly descriptive rather

than evaluative; the apparatus records dates and places of publication, current and archived web addresses, and a list of additional directory entries for work by its author. Each entry is accompanied by a selection of screenshots and a set of classificatory metatags. Some include a section for editorial comments and additional discussion.

Most entries in this instantiation of the directory were composed by members of the Editorial Working Group. As the pool of contributors expands to include general users, it will be crucial to continue to provide and enforce clear guidelines for the entries.

**Recommendations for guidelines:**

- To forestall self-promotion, guidelines currently state that entries should not be composed by authors of the work at hand. This should be enforced.
- To keep entries succinct and to the purpose, they should not be cut-and-pasted into the directory from previously published commentary.
- To be useful, work not yet completed should not be listed.
- To properly credit authors and facilitate additional research, sources should be provided for all citations from published commentary.
- For ease of reading, entries should be formatted with a space between the paragraphs.

b) ***The entry-formation process:*** ELD Version 2.0 puts into place a three-stage process for the submission, review, and, when approved, stabilization of “seed” entries. At the moment, entries are open to discussion at two points: 1) for editorial commentary before they are approved and stabilized; 2) for more general debate and discussion after the entry is “locked into place.” The active review and stabilization of the entries differentiate the ELD from more common forms of wikis and blogs. The guidelines for following this process spelled out in the ELD Working Group Handbook are clear and useful.

This procedure has generated an excellent set of entries. It seems important to note, however, that the most thoughtful—and hence most useful—entries were posted by a small core of working group members (most notably, Davin Heckman, Lisa Swanstrom, Patricia Tomaszek, and John Vincler). Entries not yet stabilized have elicited editorial suggestions from just one member of the working group (Swanstrom); and, with the exception of a comment by Scott Rettberg, general discussion of entries has yet to materialize. I mention this not to fault the model, which appears to work well, but to note that the project’s goal for wide participation and robust discussion is yet to met.

**Recommendations for encouraging wider participation:**

- To expand the pool of ELD contributors, it may prove useful to conceptualize and put into place of a set of incentives for contributing entries. With the exception of a core of annotators rewarded by the grant, the primary incentive now in place is the opportunity to help establish “the lasting value of work produced in a networked environment.” As the project proceeds, more concrete means to stimulate participation may be necessary.
- One method to expand participation in the directory is to tie models for the generation and discussion of entries into a Resource Bank of syllabi and assignments for courses at various levels of digital pedagogy. As Professor Rita Raley notes in a comment on Tabbi’s 2009 reflections, the current generation of students, now “digital born,” is particularly well positioned to

produce “models of reception and commentary.” It will, therefore, be important to find ways to tap into this resource.

- To recruit additional participants and also to make sure that digital literature is preserved, archived, and distributed through established as well as newly devised channels, it will be useful for the ELO and ELD to develop alliances with Library Information and Science scholars and the programs that train them.
- To facilitate the inclusion of a global array of electronic literatures, the guidelines somewhat paradoxically stipulate that entries must be composed in English. To support this decision, the guidelines cite Frederic Jameson’s observation that “for most people in the world English is . . . the lingua franca of money and power,” but it is important to note that digital literatures are, like all literatures, deeply embedded in the cultural languages in which they are composed. A useful goal for the long run would be to develop a mechanism to translate and include entries composed in non-English languages.
- To contribute an entry, users are required to create a free account and log in to the site. It is perhaps worth mentioning that I applied for an account August 22<sup>nd</sup> but have yet to hear back from the site administrators. In order not to discourage potential contributions, this process needs to be expedited.

c) *Metatagging*: The crowd-sourced method of confronting what might be perceived as “the sprawl and chaos” of bottom-up knowledge-formation operates through the collective generation of terms and keywords to “identify, name, tag, describe, and legitimate works of literature written and circulating within digital media” (Tabbi 2007). The most ambitious and perhaps also the most vexed aspect of ELD Version 2.0 is its reliance on the efficacy of “folksonomy.” As defined in the Working Group Handbook, folksonomy is a hybrid practice of folklore and taxonomy that operates not through top-down, official, authorized representations of knowledge but through the gradual eliciting, sorting, refinement, and re-use of descriptive terms produced by general readers. The directory’s wager is that through the aggregation and evolution of keywords, it can tap into, record, and bring the general reader’s wisdom to bear on the construction of the field of electronic literature.

In the thoughtful debate that follows Tabbi’s reflections “On Reading 300 Works of Electronic Literature,” the primary bone of contention is the efficacy of tagging. Is a tag a simple, more-or-less intuitive descriptive term or a more complex and consequential critical lens through which imaginative work is interpreted and assessed? Is the act of tagging personal and idiosyncratic, dependent on locally operative lexicons of cultural subgroups, or reflective of more general communal assumptions and values? Can tagging create, in the long run, an innovative vocabulary that will make electronic literature widely comprehensible or, to the contrary, does it risk reiterating in unreflective and limiting ways categories in place to describe print literature and/or visual art? Are tags, in sum, “bewildered, superficial add-on[s] to searching, collecting, editing, annotating and other activities modeled on older paradigms of working in a ‘library,’ ‘archive,’ ‘edition,’ etc..” or do they function, on the contrary, as cutting edge tools of knowledge management?

These oppositions are, of course, heuristic moments in an energetic debate. While it is true that all acts of description have interpretive consequences, some tagging seems relatively straightforward: the identification of scripting programs (Flash, Java,

Shockwave), the specification of compositional practices (collaboration, animation), the identification of spoken languages (French, English, Spanish), seem at once simple and useful. Challenges as well as opportunities for innovation emerge most forcefully when tags broach issues of genre, periodization, and social consequence: What is “poetry,” for example, in a networked and programmable medium? Does “memoir” mean the same thing for digital subjectivity as it does for subjectivities constructed in print? What does it mean to call a multimodal digital composition “literature”? Are terms such as “postmodern” or “experimental” useful in a digital context? And, finally, to turn to tags from the Electronic Literature Collection, Volume 1, what are the implications of singling out “women authors” or “non-English” compositions?

In the discussion following Tabbi’s reflections, Alan Liu usefully distinguishes between “high-level criticism,” on the one hand, and “lower-level” acts of “filtering or linking,” on the other. Putting aside for a moment the tricky resonances of “higher” and “lower,” Liu identifies two moments or stages of thought that are different but, at least potentially, complementary: the sorting of complex compositions into categories that may seem intuitive, on the one hand, and, on the other, critical analysis of the nature, implications, and consequences of the construction of these categories.

That languages of sorting often seem routine or self-evident is at once the advantage and the drawback of tagging. Intuitive descriptions can open unanticipated angles of approach to new media compositions, mobilize insights from diverse discourse communities, and develop new strategies of credentialing authors and commentators. Descriptions of “electronic literature,” however, understandably and problematically tend to draw on a lexicon developed to describe works composed in print. Because, as N. Katherine Hayles argues, “To see electronic literature through the lens of print is, in a significant sense, not to see it at all,” much of the most powerful and useful criticism of electronic works involves the act of naming computational, coded, networked, programmed, multimodal, and emergent aspects of digital composition: such terms as Espen J. Aarseth’s “cybertext,” John Cayley’s “networked and programmable,” Hayles’s “intermediation,” Alan Sondheim’s “code poetry,” or Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s “remediation,” among many others, are not intuitive—far from it—but they have been crucial to the development of knowledge about the works the directory describes.

Both intuitive, practical filtering, sorting, and cataloguing, on the one hand, and self-reflexive, abstract analysis of terms, on the other, are crucial to the development of a useful directory of electronic literature. Without additional reflection on the meaning of the metatags, however, acts of tagging cannot by themselves construct a useful lexicon for an emerging practice. The recommendations below, then, are not meant to damp the function of tagging as a primary method of crowd-sourced knowledge management but rather to imagine ways to encourage reflection on the tags that become important descriptors of digital literature and thereby to transfer some of the burden currently placed on tags to a set of potential directory features and supplements.

**Recommendations for augmenting the ELD’s critical functions:**

- The development of a “Featured Tags” section on the ELD webpage to provide a forum for discussion about the meaning and use of particularly complicated or vexed tags. On the model of Tabbi’s “On Reading 300 Works,” this might take the form of short monthly or bimonthly editorial comments followed by open discussion.

- The development of a more substantial glossary of electronic literary tags in circulation in the directory: this glossary would complement such projects as the *Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media and Textuality* now in progress but with the aim of provisional and emergent rather than authoritative or fixed entries.
- The development of a stand-alone directory/bibliography of criticism in the field of electronic literature: this resource would gather the critical articles now scattered through the directory into a separate section, also tagged and emergent. Like the directory itself, this list cannot be comprehensive or even, perhaps, verifiably representative, but its ongoing development will nonetheless prove extremely useful to scholars, teachers, and students of digital literature.
- And, finally, if possible, a forum for ongoing discussion of residual and emergent meanings of the term “literature.”

These supplements need to be created and maintained not as engines of top-down monitoring but as open-ended ruminations on current practices. Their function, that is, would be exploratory and ruminative rather than restrictive: they would serve as places for a community of practitioners and critics to think about how we think and to track a field of knowledge in continual and productive flux. The aim would be not to construct a universal set of categories but rather, as Tabbi suggests, to create the conditions for “a practice capable of producing a poetics” (“On Reading”).

d) *On-line survey tool*: One aspiration of the start-up grant was to create an on-line survey tool to assess the directory’s activity and quality of engagement with the field of electronic literature. This would seem most usefully done once the directory reaches a wider audience of participants in its creation and maintenance.

**Recommendation:**

- the creation of an online survey tool for ELD 2.0 participants and users

e) *Miscellaneous*:

**Recommendations:**

- To encourage repeated visits to the directory, it might be useful—and fun—to ask a succession of artists and/or scholars to generate monthly “Top Ten” lists on the model of UbuWeb’s recommended entries.
- To find ways to encourage the use of the ELD 2.0 in digital courses.
- To promote this resource in materials developed by such allied enterprises as ELO, ELC, CEL, PAD, and ELO’s annual conferences.

Conclusion. ELD Version 2.0 promises to be a crucial resource for the recording, discussion, and credentialing of works of and about electronic literature. The Project Editor, the Grant Coordinator, the Design and Implementation Team, and the Editorial Working Group have put the National Endowment Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant to wise and efficient use. Their exemplary work deserves the gratitude and commendation of the electronic literature community.